

# Virginia Department of Historic Resources

## PIF Resource Information Sheet

This information sheet is designed to provide the Virginia Department of Historic Resources with the necessary data to be able to evaluate the significance of the property for possible listing in the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. This is not a formal nomination, but a necessary step in determining whether or not the property could be considered eligible for listing. Please take the time to fill in as many fields as possible. A greater number of completed fields will result in a more timely and accurate assessment. Staff assistance is available to answer any questions you have in regards to this form.

<b>General Property Information</b>	For Staff Use Only DHR ID #: 081-6935
Property Name(s): <u>Oak Hill; Cameron-Harmon Plantation</u>	
Property Date(s): <u>1821, 1873</u> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Circa <input type="checkbox"/> Pre <input type="checkbox"/> Post    Open to the Public? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	
Property Address: <u>Alphin Lane, Rt. 750</u> City: <u>Lexington</u> Zip: <u>24450</u>	
County or Ind. City: <u>Lexington</u> USGS Quad(s): <u>Lexington</u>	
<b>Physical Character of General Surroundings</b>	
Acreage: <u>197.1</u> Setting (choose one): <input type="checkbox"/> City <input type="checkbox"/> Urban <input type="checkbox"/> Town <input type="checkbox"/> Suburban <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rural <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation Corridor	
<p><b>Site Description Notes/Notable Landscape Features:</b> 2002 survey: The property consists of rolling, fallow fields. The dwelling sits upon a small bluff. Mature trees surround the east and west sides of the hilltop on which the house stands. A gravel drive leads from Alphin Road to the house. At the head of the drive along Alphin Road are three brick piers, which are all that remain of a front gate. On the center pier, the name "Oak Hill" is etched into a stone block.</p> <p><b>Secondary Resource Description</b> (Briefly describe any other structures (or archaeological sites) that may contribute to the significance of the property:  The most significant secondary resource may be the Valley Railroad bed, which runs on a north-south axis, just to the east of the main house, within 150 feet at its closest point. The RR bed now appears as a trench with a flat bottom. About 1400 feet south-southeast of the house is a railroad underpass with cut-stone walls/buttrresses. It appears that the stone structure on the north side of Alphin Road is part of the current Oak Hill parcel, but its counterpart on the south side of the road is not. Another significant resource on the property is the ruin of a c. 1821 brick house located 200 feet west-northwest of the main (frame) house. The front wall of the brick house faced east, but has collapsed entirely. Only the back (west) and south walls stand mostly intact. A later frame addition was affixed to the north end of the brick house, but it too is in ruinous condition. About 85 feet west of the main house are the ruins of an outbuilding of unknown function. The ruins consist of a mostly intact, raised limestone-rubble foundation, extending 4-5 feet above ground surface, its footprint measuring roughly 8 x 10 feet. The only door opening is in the east wall. Nothing else remains of the building. Just behind the main block of the house, at a distance of 40 feet, is a 1.5-story, front-gabled, frame outbuilding that appears to date to circa 1920.</p>	
Ownership Category: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Public-Local <input type="checkbox"/> Public-State <input type="checkbox"/> Public-Federal	

<b>Individual Resource Information</b>
What was the historical use of this resource? Examples include: Dwelling, Grist Mill, Bridge, Store, Tobacco Barn, etc...
Dwelling(s); Railroad line
What is the current use? (if other than the historical use) <u>Vacant / work-in-progress</u>
Architectural style or elements of styles: <u>Italianate</u>
Architect, builder, or original owner: <u>unknown</u>
# of stories <u>2</u> Condition: <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Ruins <input type="checkbox"/> Rebuilt <input type="checkbox"/> Renovated
Are there any known threats to this property? <u>Deterioration</u>

**Resource Component Information**

Please answer the following questions regarding the individual components of the resource. If the component does not exist, answer "n/a." If you feel uncomfortable in answering the question, please leave the space blank. Photographs of the features can also help our staff identify specific feature components. Usually, priority is given to describing features on the primary (front) facade of the structure.

**Foundation:**

Squared limestone block laid in distinct courses

**Structure:**

Sawn framing.

**Walls:**

Weatherboards

**Windows:**

2/2 double-hung sash

**Porch:**

One-story, nearly full-width, 3-bay shed-roofed porch with square, bracketed posts. Standing-seam metal roof.

**Roof:**

Standing-seam metal hip roof.

**Chimney(s):** Two central interior brick chimneys.

**Architectural Description of Individual Resource or General Description of District:** *(Please describe architectural patterns, types, features, additions, remodelings, or other alterations. A sketch of the current floor plan would be appreciated)*

Oak Hill is a relatively old name for the Cameron/Harmon plantation, located on the north side of Alphin Road. The brick house on the property, now in ruins, was the main plantation house until the large two-story, hip-roofed, double-pile frame house was erected in the early 1870s. The Virginia Historical Inventory record for the property indicates the brick house was constructed in 1821.

### Harmon House

Summary: The Harmon farmhouse remains intact, but is vacant and in only fair condition. It is a two-story, three-bay frame dwelling constructed c. 1873. Architectural clues such as the Italianate details (e.g. bracketed eaves), interior chimneys and two-over-two windows support this date. The building has a stone foundation, weatherboarded exterior walls, two central-interior brick chimneys, and a standing-seam-metal-clad hip roof with bracketed eaves. The windows are two-over-two, double-hung wood sash. Many have broken glazing or are missing entirely and boarded-up. The south (front) elevation has a three-bay hipped-roof porch supported by four bracketed wood posts. The front entry consists of a paneled wood door with a two-light transom and two-light side-lights. A first-story polygonal bay window lights the southeast room. A one-story shed-roof addition was added on the north (rear) elevation. A gabled-roof wing was attached the shed-roof addition.

Architectural Details: The building faces southwest. Its foundation/basement walls consist of squared limestone blocks laid in distinct courses. The basement is entered via a bulkhead with folding doors on the west side of the house, but could not be accessed during the survey. The house framing consists of light vertical members spaced one foot on center, with brick nogging. All of the framing and lath is circular-sawn as would be expected. Most of the weatherboards appear to be original, judging by the cut nails. The interior features four-panel doors and eight fireplaces with mantels designed in common Italianate forms, except for the two identical mantels in the first-floor east rooms, which are highly embellished with unusual vernacular

Late Victorian motifs including square, chamfered pilasters, paired shelf brackets, detailed scrollwork and round pendants. The fireboxes and brick hearths remain intact. Most of the wide pine flooring throughout the house survives intact. The wide central passage has a stair with walnut handrail, turned balusters, and heavy turned newel post, and flat-plastered spandrel. A bathroom with a curvilinear partition wall was added to the 1st floor, northwest room, probably in the 1950s. The roof has relatively new, crimped standing seam metal (it and several windows have been repaired since the 2002 survey) and a roof hatch, and may have once had a balustraded deck like many double-pile houses with hipped roofs of the period, given the panoramic views to be enjoyed from the rooftop.

## Significance Statement:

### Summary and Criteria Justification

The Oak Hill parcel includes several important remnants of 19th-century life in the middle Valley of Virginia. The parcel includes a number of different types of historic structures with a range of construction dates beginning during the first quarter of the nineteenth century and ending circa 1920. Adding to the property's historic value is a well-preserved section of the Valley Railroad bed. The Valley Railroad began in 1866 and became defunct by 1874, completed only between Harrisonburg and Lexington, to a point a short distance south of Oak Hill. Furthermore, the archaeological potential of the property should not be overlooked, particularly in the area of the brick house and outbuilding ruins located west of the 1873 frame house.<sup>1</sup>

Oak Hill appears to be eligible at the local level under Criteria A (Transportation), C (Architecture), and D (Archaeology). In addition, the house may meet Criterion B for its association with Asher Waterman Harman, Jr., the longest serving Treasurer of Virginia in the history of the Commonwealth. The period of significance begins c. 1821 with construction of the brick house, and ends c. 1942 with the discontinuation of the former Valley Railroad.

## Historical Background:

### Col. Andrew Cameron

The Gilham map of 1860 identifies the property as belonging to Col. Andrew Cameron. According to the 1860 census, Andrew, a wealthy 54 year old farmer who, with his wife Ellen had nine children, was the only Cameron in Rockbridge County at the time. He owned 49 slaves, supervised by an overseer named Samuel H. Barnett. Cameron's farm consisted of a total of 1600 acres valued at 55,000 dollars, 1000 acres being improved land. His livestock consisted of 23 horses, one mule, 74 cows, 180 sheep, and 150 swine. In 1859, Cameron's main crops included wheat, Indian corn, and oats. In 1859, he harvested 1,500 bushels of wheat, 2,000 bushels of Indian corn, and 1,000 bushels of oats.<sup>2</sup>

### Hunter's Raid

Confederate troops are said to have camped on the Oak Hill property on June 11, 1864, the night before Gen. David Hunter's men, enroute to Lynchburg, burned the Virginia Military Institute – just 1 ½ miles to the southwest, in Lexington. Hunter's men may have burned the brick house belonging to Col. Cameron upon leaving VMI. Indeed an 1867 county survey map depicts the house location with the label “burned house.”

### Asher Waterman Harman, Jr.

Asher Waterman Harman, Jr., for whom the extant house at Oak Hill was built, was born on September 6, 1850, in Staunton, Virginia, a son of Col. Michael Garber Harman of 52nd regiment, Va. Infantry, and mother, Caroline V. Stevenson. [Note: The “Jr.” in Asher's name is inconsistent with his father's name, but both names appear in numerous sources.] Asher's early life was passed in the town of Staunton, and he worked on his Augusta County father's farm during his vacations. He obtained his primary education in the local schools and entered VMI on Sept. 7, 1868 and graduated July 4, 1872, standing 24 in a class of 35. At Lexington, Virginia, December 11, 1872, Asher Harman married Eugenia M. Cameron, the daughter of Col. Andrew W. Cameron, and built the house now known as Oak Hill on property received from his father-in-law. The couple would have 12 children, 11 of whom survived to adulthood. Asher was engaged in farming and worked as manager of stage lines in the Valley of Virginia until 1881. He was also involved in mail contracting and railroad contracting, and was president for a time of the James River packet line from Richmond to Buchanan and Lexington, Virginia, prior to the building of the Richmond and Alleghany Railroad along the line of the old James River and Kanawha canal. On January 1, 1886, he was elected as Treasurer of the State of Virginia. Continually re-elected to successive four-year terms, he served in that post for over 30 years, a vastly longer term than any other Virginia state treasurer since 1766. He continued farming at Oak Hill during his term, and died in Richmond on April 11, 1917.<sup>3</sup>

### The Valley Railroad

The remnant rail bed traversing the Oak Hill property serves as a reminder of the post-Civil War effort to build a railroad connecting the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad at Harrisonburg to the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad at Salem. The 113-mile Valley Railroad was chartered by the General Assembly in 1866 and organized on April 4 of that year in Staunton, Virginia. Funding of the project proceeded slowly, but in 1872 work was started on the 26 – mile Harrisonburg to Staunton segment and, by March 1874, trains were running between the two cities. During this period, a contract was awarded to the Mason Syndicate to build the Staunton to Salem segment within three years.<sup>4</sup>

By November, 1874, the rail bed had been completed the full distance to Salem, Virginia. Masonry drainage structures and bridges for the completed portions of the rail bed had been completed at all but the major stream crossings. However, it was at this time that the Valley Railroad's officers were forced to suspend work. Bond issues had not been fully subscribed, private investors had not stepped forward and there was no interest by financial institution in the proposed mortgage. The Valley Railroad was insolvent, a victim of the September 1873 national financial panic and the resulting nation-wide depression which lasted until 1877. The work between Salem and Lexington was abandoned.<sup>5</sup>

The line was completed to Lexington in October, 1881. The new president, Samuel Spencer, hoped the extension would produce large profits, but construction on the Staunton to Lexington segment was not completed until late 1883. The line between Harrisonburg and Lexington was not profitable. Finally, the Harrisonburg to Staunton section was sold in 1942 to the Chesapeake and Western Railroad, and the Staunton to Lexington section was abandoned. The rails were removed and scrapped for the World War II effort.<sup>6</sup>

### Constitution Oak

In front of the Harmon House are a number of aged oak trees for which the property is named. Tradition holds that the extant tree closest to the house, at a distance of about 75 feet, is one of the 125 commemorative "Constitutional Oak" saplings from Canada given as gifts to delegates of the 1901-1902 Constitutional Convention in Richmond. Constitutional Oaks were meant to symbolize the end of military rule that had come with the Reconstruction era and were planted by Confederate Veterans. The tree at Oak Hill has suffered loss of limbs, and does not appear to be healthy, but several nearby oak trees of nearly equal girth have fared much better.<sup>7</sup>

1. Michael Pulice, 2008 DHR survey. DHR archives.
2. U.S. Bureau of Census 1860: Agricultural Schedule as cited in Louis Berger Section 106 survey, 2002, DHR archives.
3. Robert Alonzo Brock and Virgil Anson Lewis, *Virginia and Virginians: Eminent Virginians ... History of Virginia from Settlement of Jamestown to Close of the Civil War, Volume 2*, 1888. [[http://genealogytrails.com/vir/augusta/bio\\_h.html](http://genealogytrails.com/vir/augusta/bio_h.html)]; and Lyon Gardiner Tyler, *Men of Mark in Virginia, Ideals of American life: A Collection of Biographies of the Leading Men in the State, Volume 2*, 1907: 8. [<http://www.ebooksread.com/authors-eng/lyon-gardiner-tyler/men-of-mark-in-virginia-ideals-of-american-life-a-span-classsearchterm-ely-744/page-8-men-of-mark-in-virginia-ideals-of-american-life-a-span-classsearchterm-ely-744.shtml>]
4. Hildebrand, John R., *Iron Horses in the Valley, The Valley and Shenandoah Valley Railroads, 1866 – 1882*, History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia; Salem, Virginia, Salem Historical Society, 2001.
5. Ibid.
6. [http://www.abandonedrails.com/Staunton\\_to\\_Lexington](http://www.abandonedrails.com/Staunton_to_Lexington)
7. Sherry Joines Wyatt, "The Constitution Oak: Leaves of History in Christiansburg's Town Square," in *Virginia's Montgomery County*, 2009.

8.

<b>Legal Owner(s) of the Property</b> (For more than one owner, please use a separate sheet.)			
Mr. <input type="checkbox"/>	Mrs. <input type="checkbox"/>		
Ms. <input type="checkbox"/>	Miss <input type="checkbox"/>		
487 Maury River Road		Lexington	VA 24450
(Address)		(City)	(State) (Zip Code)
(Email Address)		(Daytime telephone including area code)	
Owner's Signature: _____		Date: _____	
<b>• • Signature required for processing all applications. • •</b>			
In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.			
Contact person: _____			
Daytime Telephone: (      )			

<b>Applicant Information</b> (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)			
Mr. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mrs. <input type="checkbox"/>		
Ms. <input type="checkbox"/>	Miss <input type="checkbox"/>		
Mike Pulice		DHR	
(Name)		(Firm)	
Salem			
(Address)		(City)	(State) (Zip Code)
Michael.pulice@dhr.virginia.gov		540-387-5443	
(Email Address)		(Daytime telephone including area code)	
Applicant's Signature: _____		Date: October 23, 2012	

<b>Notification</b>			
In some circumstances, it may be necessary for the department to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator or City Manager.			
Mr. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mrs. <input type="checkbox"/>	Dr. <input type="checkbox"/>	
Miss <input type="checkbox"/>	Ms. <input type="checkbox"/>	Hon. <input type="checkbox"/>	
Spencer Suter		County Administrator	
(Name)		(Position)	
Rockbridge County		County Administration Building, 150 South Main Street	
(Locality)		(Address)	
Lexington	VA	24450	540-463-4361
(City)	(State)	(Zip Code)	(Daytime telephone including area code)

Please use the following space to explain why you are seeking an evaluation of this property.

**We hope to explore the potential for a non-profit group to rehabilitate and utilize the property while keeping its historic character intact.**

Would you be interested in the State and/or the Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits? Yes ☒ No ☐

Would you be interested in the easement program? Yes ☒ No ☐